

The First Presbyterian Church
Newark, Essex County, New Jersey

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of New Jersey

Historic American Buildings Survey
Seymour Williams, District Officer
133 Central Avenue, Rahway, New Jersey

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The First Presbyterian Church
Newark, Essex County, New Jersey

Owners: The Trustees of the First Presbyterian Church

Date of Erection: 1787

Architect: Elcazar Ball (probable)

Builder: Unknown

Present condition: The exterior of the church is in very good shape and has not been altered much, but the interior has been completely done over within recent years.

Number of stories: One story with gallery

Material of construction: Exterior walls - Brown stone ashlar with white mortar

Interior partitions of frame

Floor of wood

Roof slate - pitched and gambrel

Steeple of frame

Originally the church was two or three steps up from the street level, but the latter has been graded up so that it is now level with the street.

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Historical Data:

"In 1667 or 1668," states Mac Whorter, "the place (Newark) was settled by about thirty families from Connecticut. These first settlers brought a minister with them; and they became a Christian Church as soon as they became a settlement." Stearns declares, "The only organization for devine worship in the English language, which could bear a comparison with this in point of age, is the venerable sister church of Elizabethtown." The minister that the colonists from Connecticut brought with them was the Reverend Abraham Pierson, whose son later became a pastor of the church and then president of Yale.

In September 1668 the first movement was made toward building a meeting house; a second church was erected in 1708. Mac Whorter gives the following account: "In his (Rev. Nathaniel Bowers) time, to wit, in 1708 the second church in this town was built of stone a little to the North of the first church, which was a small wooden building. It was an exceeding great exertion of the people to erect it; and it was the most elegant edifice for public worship at that time in the colony, however mean it may now be considered.....vigorous attempts were made for its enlargement in 1754 and '55 when it wanted a new roof and many repairs. The plan of enlarging it was laid aside, but in 1756 it was new covered and repaired; and is now converted into a Court House." Stearns believes, however, that it was built between 1714 and 1716. Up until this time the church worked upon a Congregational basis; a change in church policy was affected and the church became Presbyterian about 1720. The most famous pastor of the church, the Reverend Aaron Burr, later president of the College of New Jersey, now Princeton, belongs to the period before the Revolution.

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During the pastorate of the Reverend Alexander Mac Whorter D.D., who held control of the church from 1759 to 1807, a movement was started to build a new church; the war stopped it; the project was resumed in 1787 and the present church was first regularly opened in 1791. This building was erected in a new site on the East side of Broad Street; the previous two churches had been built on the West side. Stearns gives Mac Whorter's description of it (249 footnote): "Its dimensions are one hundred feet in length, including the steeple, which projects eight feet. The steeple is two hundred and four feet high; two tiers of windows, five in a tier on each side; an elegant large venetian window in the rear behind the pulpit, and the whole finished in the inside in the most handsome manner in the Doric order. From the best estimate I can obtain," he adds, "it costs about L9000 York currency."

Bibliography:

Mac Whorter, A. A Century Sermon, Preached in Newark, New Jersey, January 1, 1801; containing A Brief History of the Presbyterian Church in that Town
Newark, W. Tuttle & Company, 1807

Stearns, J.F. Historical Discourses relating to the First Presbyterian Church in Newark
Newark, Daily Advertiser Office, 1853

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Rev. Aug 20, 36 T.W.